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A Special Report to the Legislature

Child Support Enforcement: The Story Behind the Stories

August 1993

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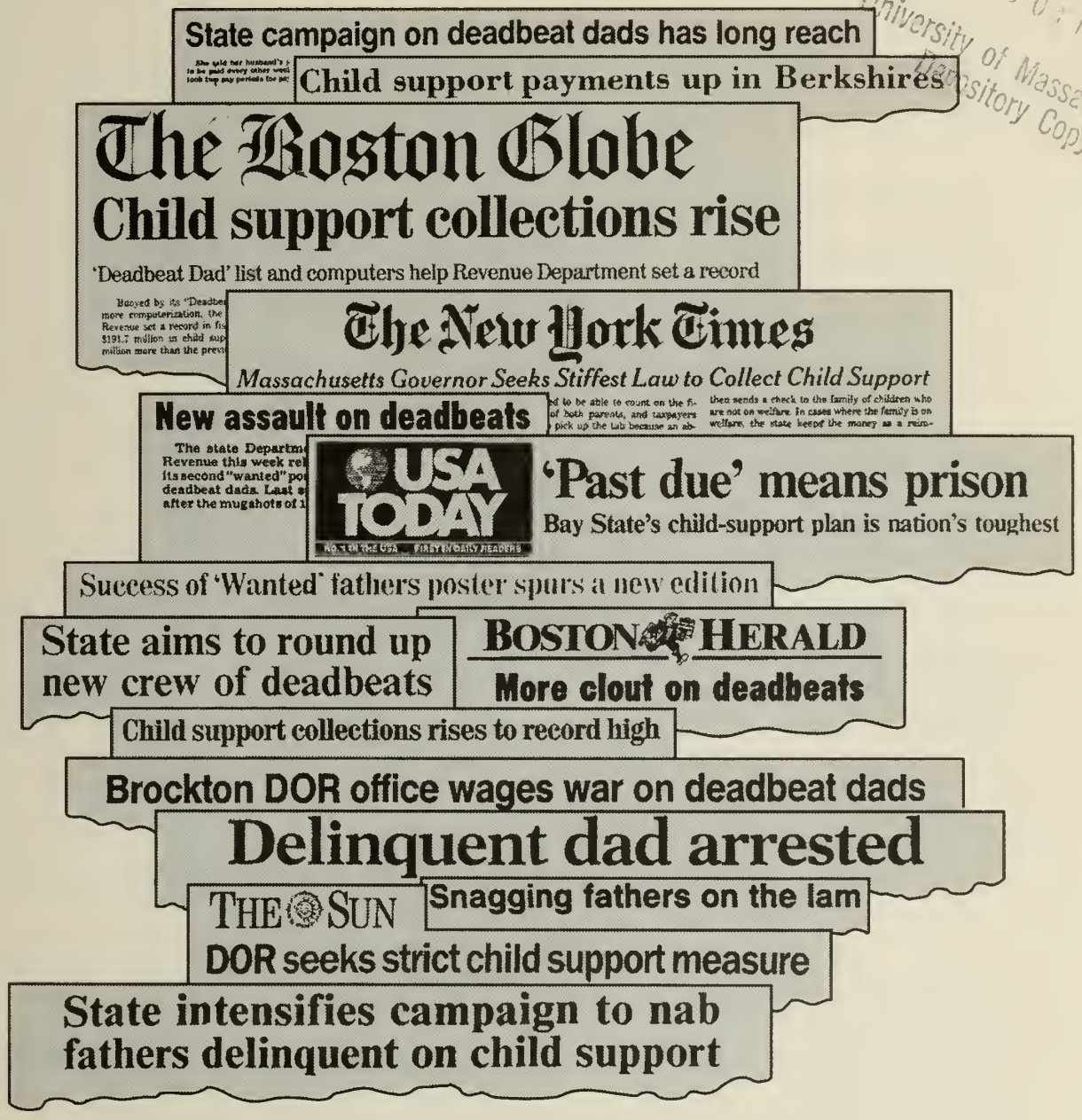
State campaign on deadbeat dads has long reach
Child support payments up in Berkshires
The Boston Globe
Child support collections rise
'Deadbeat Dad' list and computers help Revenue Department set a record
The New York Times
Massachusetts Governor Seeks Stiffest Law to Collect Child Support
New assault on deadbeats
USA TODAY
'Past due' means prison
Bay State's child-support plan is nation's toughest
Success of 'Wanted' fathers poster spurs a new edition
State aims to round up new crew of deadbeats
BOSTON HERALD
More clout on deadbeats
Child support collections rises to record high
Brockton DOR office wages war on deadbeat dads
Delinquent dad arrested
THE SUN
Snagging fathers on the lam
DOR seeks strict child support measure
State intensifies campaign to nab fathers delinquent on child support

Department of Revenue
Child Support Enforcement Division

Mitchell Adams, Commissioner

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MITCHELL ADAMS
COMMISSIONER

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Department of Revenue
Child Support Enforcement
100 Cambridge Street, Boston 02204

Dear Legislator:

As I'm sure you have noticed, Massachusetts' child support enforcement efforts have been in the headlines quite a bit this past year.

We've received this recognition because of our efforts to change the mentality behind child support in this state: we're out to make non-custodial parents think of child support as their first obligation and not their last. We are trying to find new ways to change a grim fact: one out of four children in Massachusetts now lives with a single parent, half of them well below the poverty line.

Your support of our new child support programs has been critical to the many successes we have seen. The programs that we have been able to implement have broken new ground. Massachusetts is at the forefront nationally in making non-custodial parents recognize and shoulder their financial obligations for their children. In fact, our use of computers to collect child support has earned Massachusetts a Ford Foundation grant for our innovative approach to tackling child support delinquency — a $5 billion problem nationwide.

With your backing and that of the Governor and Lt. Governor, we have been able to increase child support collections again this year, for a total increase of $46 million in the two years since our new program began. And the number of families receiving child support each week has climbed to 46,641, up almost 10,000 — 25 percent — in two years.

Highlights of our accomplishments this fiscal year include:

➤ Record-breaking collections once again
Total collections this year hit a record high of $207.3 million. Collections for families on AFDC increased for the second year in a row to $76.6 million, more than double the increase realized last year.

➤ "New hire" system
Changing jobs to avoid paying child support is a common tactic. But our new, computerized "new hire" tracking system finds job-hopping non-custodial parents in a matter of days and deducts child support directly from their paychecks. This first-in-the-nation system will increase child support collections by $14.5 million annually.

➤ Computerized bank match system and workers compensation program
During FY93, we levied 10,000 bank accounts for $4.1 million and collected another $1.4 million from workers compensation awards.

➤ Ten Most Wanted Lists

We captured eight hard-core child support delinquents from the two Ten Most Wanted Lists we published this year and prosecuted high-profile delinquents such as former Red Sox pitcher Dick Drago and multimillion-dollar lottery winner Albert Tecci. These highly visible cases reinforce the message that society will no longer tolerate parents who abandon their children.

➤ Improved customer service

As might be expected, our stepped-up enforcement efforts have increased the number of customer inquiries we receive. To handle the increased business, in February 1993, we opened our centralized customer service center in Wakefield, tripled our customer service staff and installed a modern phone system. As a result, we are now providing better service to our customers — both custodial and non-custodial parents — when they have a question or a problem.

➤ Introduction of our child support legislative package

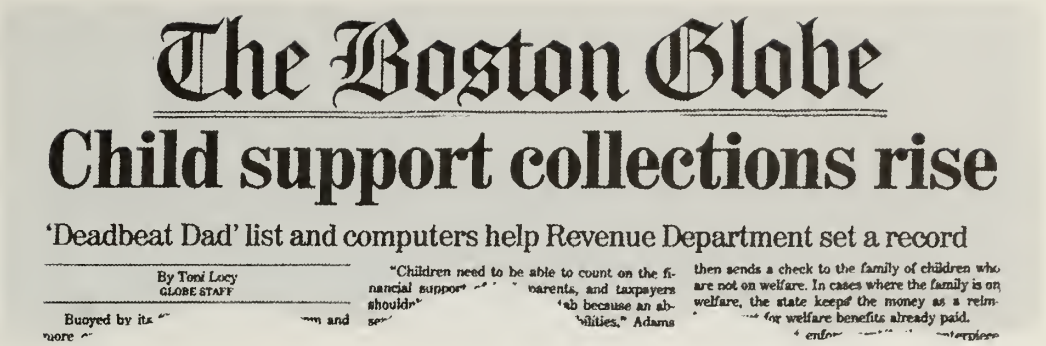
We have scoured the nation for innovative child support enforcement laws and put together the most comprehensive legislative package in the country. When fully implemented, it will increase child support collections by $95 million annually and generate $67 million in AFDC and Medicaid savings. We believe this bill can be passed this year and ask for your focused attention and support.

We are proud of our FY93 accomplishments, but we do not intend to rest on our laurels in FY94. The problems single-parent families face are not going away; our caseload continues to grow every day. We must continue to come up with **more** innovative ways to collect more child support, faster, with less staff effort per case. Only when we are making a difference to **every** financially abandoned family in Massachusetts will we be able to say we are finally ahead of the game.

With your continued help, we'll keep the good news coming.

Sincerely,

Mitchell Adams
Commissioner



The Boston Globe

Child support collections rise

'Deadbeat Dad' list and computers help Revenue Department set a record

By Toni Locy
GLOBE STAFF

Buoyed by its [illegible] and more [illegible]

"Children need to be able to count on the financial support [illegible] parents, and taxpayers shouldn't [illegible] because an ability," Adams

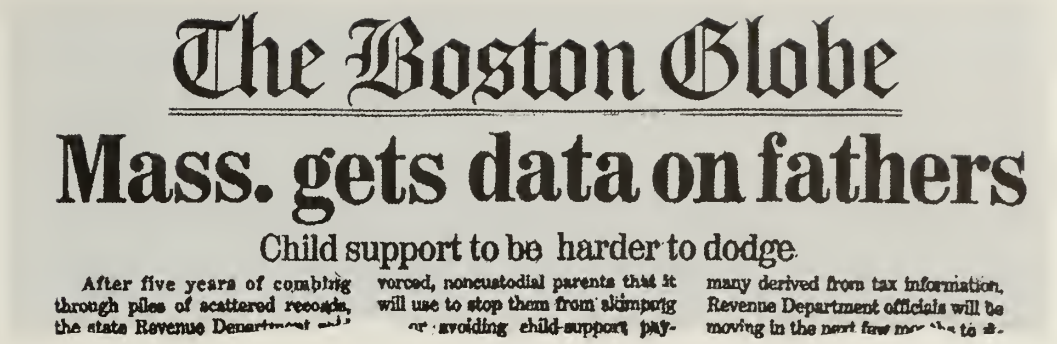
then sends a check to the family of children who are not on welfare. In cases where the family is on welfare, the state keeps the money as a reimbursement for welfare benefits already paid.

Child Support Collections Are Up

Child support collections this year were up $15.6 million, the largest jump in four years. And we achieved these record-setting collections despite a sluggish economy and an early retirement program that reduced staffing levels. The key to our success was expanded automated enforcement: we now have the nation's most sophisticated and aggressive computer programs to locate and seize the income and assets of parents who refuse to support their children.

Automated enforcement has not only brought us increased collections this year; it has also increased our compliance rate. In FY93 we collected 61.4 percent of the current support due, up from 57 percent in FY92. Our compliance rate for non-custodial parents who live in Massachusetts is even higher — 70 percent — a direct result of automated enforcement and its focus on in-state non-custodial parents. In the past two years, we have increased the number of families receiving child support on time by almost 10,000: 25 percent more than before the automated system was introduced.

➤ Since DOR began its automated enforcement program two years ago, collections have increased $46 million.



The Boston Globe

Mass. gets data on fathers

Child support to be harder to dodge

After five years of combing through piles of scattered records, the state Revenue Department [illegible] will use to stop them from skimping or avoiding child-support pay- many derived from tax information, Revenue Department officials will be moving in the next few [illegible]

Successful New Programs Track Employees Who Owe Child Support

The best way to ensure that child support is paid on time and in full is to have those payments deducted automatically from the non-custodial parent's paycheck and sent directly to the custodial parent. In FY93, we developed new automated programs to make this happen more smoothly and efficiently than anywhere else in the country.

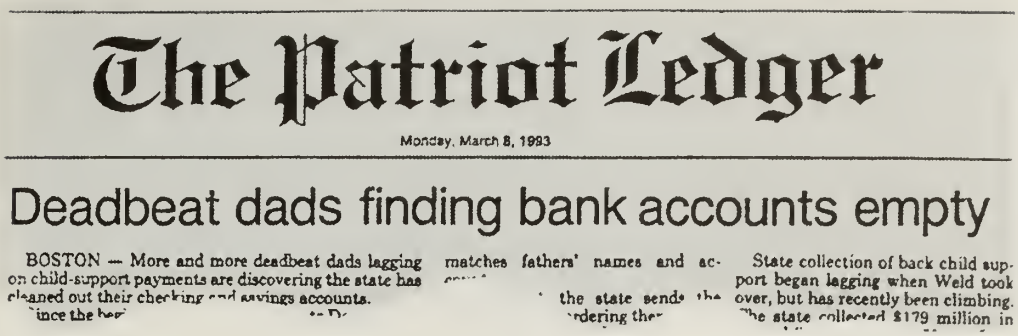
➤ "New hire" tracking system

When a non-custodial parent changes jobs, regular payments often cease because the new employer does not know to deduct the payments from the employee's paycheck. To foil this avoidance tactic, we asked for — and you gave us — authority to require employers to inform us of any new employee within 14 days of hiring. We match this "new hire" information with our records of parents who owe child support. When the computer finds a match, it automatically sends out a notice to the new employer to begin making the court-ordered deductions. With this new system, we have been able to reduce the time it takes to locate a job-hopping non-custodial parent from 15 weeks to two weeks, and wage assignment collections should yield an additional $14.5 million per year as a result.

➤ Automatic 25 percent increases in wage deductions

If a non-custodial parent owes past-due child support, it is not enough simply to deduct the amount of his support order from his paycheck. We need to deduct an additional amount that will go toward paying off this past-due support. Now we can do this automatically. For example, suppose that our computers track down a non-custodial parent who is $2,000 behind in support and whose order is $100 per week. We will instruct the employer to withhold $125 per week; the extra $25 per week will be credited toward his $2,000 in arrears.

➤ These innovations have increased wage assignment collections by 18 percent ($5.3 million) in just one year.



The Patriot Ledger

Monday, March 8, 1993

Deadbeat dads finding bank accounts empty

BOSTON — More and more deadbeat dads lagging on child-support payments are discovering the state has cleaned out their checking and savings accounts.

matches fathers' names and ac-

the state sends the

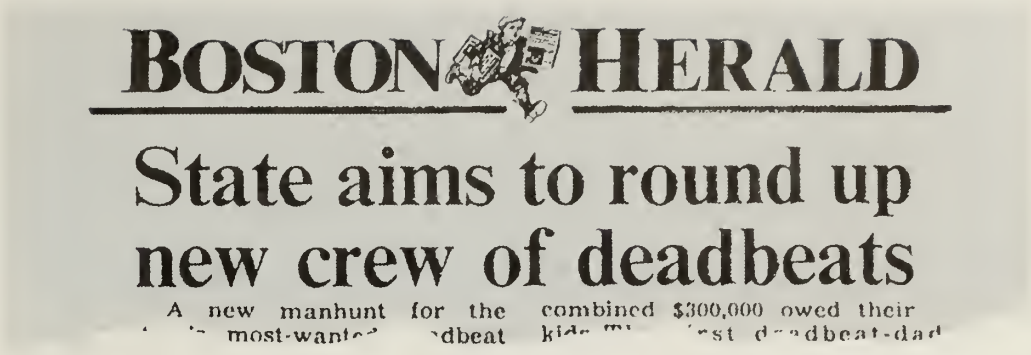
State collection of back child support began lagging when Weld took over, but has recently been climbing.

First in the Nation Computerized Bank Levy Program

Some of the most egregious examples of child support delinquency involve parents who refuse to pay child support even though they have substantial assets earning interest in bank accounts. Beginning in January 1993, we began to attack this problem with another innovative, computer-matching collection tool. We compared our file of 70,000 child support delinquents with a file of millions of Massachusetts bank accounts. Where there was a match, we had the computer perform a further analysis to ensure that the non-custodial parent had been sent at least two notices of arrears and still owed at least $200 in arrears. In cases that met these criteria, we had the computer automatically levy the assets in the non-custodial parent's accounts. Massachusetts was the first state in the United States to do this.

With this new automated collection system, we issued 9,816 levies between January and June 1993. During this same period, our bank levy collections increased tenfold.

➤ This fiscal year, we netted $4.1 million from non-custodial parents' bank accounts to apply toward their debt of past-due child support.



BOSTON HERALD

State aims to round up new crew of deadbeats

A new manhunt for the most-wanted deadbeat kids ... combined $300,000 owed their first deadbeat-dad

More Ten Most Wanted Lists Get Results

Computers collect most of our child support dollars in Massachusetts, but our ultimate goal goes beyond collecting what is past due. We want to change the attitudes of non-custodial parents so that child support is the first bill they pay and not the last. To achieve this change in attitude, we have looked beyond automated enforcement and pursued high-visibility programs such as the Ten Most Wanted lists and the extradition and prosecution of child support delinquents like Dick Drago and Albert Tecci.

Last November, we brought Dick Drago back from Florida to Massachusetts to face charges that he owed $35,000 in child support. Drago, who pitched for the Red Sox in the 1975 World Series, abandoned his son in 1984 and only sporadically paid child support after that, despite his ability to pay. With his arrest and subsequent court appearance, we sent the message that celebrity status will not shield a child support delinquent from our vigorous enforcement efforts.

We expanded on this message with the conviction of Albert Tecci, one of eight delinquents captured from the two Ten Most Wanted lists we issued this fiscal year. Tecci split a $7 million jackpot in the Colorado lottery four years ago, yet by June 1993 he owed more than $34,000 in child support to his two children in Massachusetts. At his trial, he claimed to have frittered away his winnings. The court ordered him to serve 18 months in prison, the harshest sentence known to have been handed down in Massachusetts in such a case.

➤ **Our Message: Pay your child support. Massachusetts is tough on parents who abandon their children.**

THE WAKEFIELD DAILY ITEM

16 PAGES | WAKEFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1993 | 35 CENTS | 248-0080

DOR opens Child Support office in Wakefield

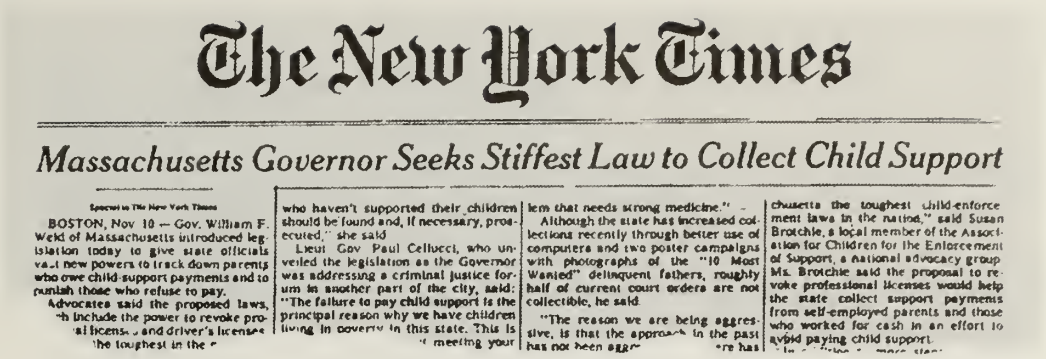
WAKEFIELD — In a move [illegible] opened the Department [illegible] cility were Sen. Richard Tisei [illegible]'s

New Wakefield Customer Service Center Opens

In February 1993, we opened our new Customer Service Center in Wakefield. With an 800 number, more employees and better, more modern equipment, this move was made to provide efficient, statewide access for all child support clients. We recognized that our stepped-up enforcement efforts created a need — and a responsibility — to beef up our ability to settle disputes and answer customers' questions. In addition, we were anxious to free up other staff to devote their attention to establishing new orders, modifying existing orders and collecting support.

At the new service center, we have tripled our telephone capacity and are handling half again as many calls now as we were one year ago. The staff now has on-line access to data that allows them to handle 90 percent of the inquiries immediately, without having to refer the matter to a caseworker in the field office. They screen applications and assess enforcement appeals faster than ever before. They resolve problems with lost or stolen checks, provide account information and histories, or track and correct account mispostings, all in the course of a single phone call.

➤ **Even with 8,000-9,000 calls coming in each week, our phone bank staff now responds to calls in a little over one minute on average, down from almost six minutes a year ago.**



The New York Times

Massachusetts Governor Seeks Stiffest Law to Collect Child Support

Special to The New York Times

BOSTON, Nov. 10 — Gov. William F. Weld of Massachusetts introduced legislation today to give state officials vast new powers to track down parents who owe child-support payments and to punish those who refuse to pay.

Advocates said the proposed laws, which include the power to revoke professional licenses and driver's licenses, are the toughest in the [illegible]

who haven't supported their children should be found and, if necessary, prosecuted," she said.

Lieut. Gov. Paul Cellucci, who unveiled the legislation as the Governor was addressing a criminal justice forum in another part of the city, said: "The failure to pay child support is the principal reason why we have children living in poverty in this state. This is [illegible] meeting your

lem that needs strong medicine."

Although the state has increased collections recently through better use of computers and two poster campaigns with photographs of the "10 Most Wanted" delinquent fathers, roughly half of current court orders are not collectible, he said.

"The reason we are being aggressive, is that the approach in the past has not been aggr[illegible]re has

chusetts the toughest child-enforcement laws in the nation," said Susan Brotchie, a local member of the Association for Children for the Enforcement of Support, a national advocacy group. Ms. Brotchie said the proposal to revoke professional licenses would help the state collect support payments from self-employed parents and those who worked for cash in an effort to avoid paying child support.

Cutting Edge Child Support Legislative Package Introduced

In November 1992, we filed a bill (refiled, with minor revisions, in April 1993) incorporating the most innovative child support enforcement techniques used in other states, techniques proven to increase support collections significantly and reduce welfare costs in states that have tried them. Passage of this legislative package will make Massachusetts the first state to have all these techniques ready for use on a statewide basis, not merely as pilot projects. Highlights include:

- Establishing a program in hospitals to offer unmarried parents the opportunity to acknowledge parentage and add the father's name to the birth certificate shortly after the child's birth.
- Improving DOR's ability to locate absent, non-paying parents by expanding our access to certain records.
- Streamlining the process for establishing and modifying child support orders.
- Improving enforcement techniques, including tools to ensure that non-custodial parents obtain health care coverage for their children when so ordered by the court.

Fully implemented, this legislative package would:

- Enable 7,000 families to go off AFDC;
- Save taxpayers $67 million annually in AFDC and Medicaid costs;
- Recoup an additional $35 million in AFDC expenditures per year; and
- Provide $60 million annually to the state's most vulnerable population: single parents and their families.

➤ This legislation will give Massachusetts the most comprehensive child support enforcement program in the country.

Our FY94 Agenda

The number of Massachusetts' single-parent families continues to grow. As a result, we must continue to refine and expand our strategies to collect more child support more efficiently. Our plans for accomplishing this in FY94 include:

➤ New in-hospital paternity acknowledgment program to be implemented
The first step in obtaining a support order for children born out-of-wedlock is to establish legal paternity, an expensive, time-consuming and adversarial process. It is a much easier process when unmarried parents have an opportunity to acknowledge parentage and add the father's name to the birth certificate shortly after birth. States with such in-hospital programs have 60 percent paternity establishment rates, as compared to Massachusetts' 33 percent rate. With such a program, we can establish 7,600 paternities per year, double the number for FY93.

➤ New child support orders to be doubled
We expect to turn most of the paternities established under the in-hospital program into new child support orders. Coupling this new program with our improved techniques for locating non-custodial parents, we plan to double the number of new child support orders established annually for families receiving AFDC payments from 6,000 to 12,000.

➤ Child support orders to be reviewed and modified
Child support orders must be reviewed and adjusted periodically to ensure that support obligations are consistent with the Child Support Guidelines and the income levels of the parents. We will compare 20,000 existing AFDC child support orders with information in tax and other databases to identify cases for modification. We estimate that we will identify at least 4,700 cases for upward modification, which will increase collections and reduce AFDC costs.

➤ Modern computer system under development
The computer system we use for child support enforcement is archaic and severely limits our capabilities to meet new challenges. We are currently designing a new system, expected to be operational in October 1995. We have obtained 90 percent federal funding for the project. When complete it will:

- Allow custodial parents 24-hour, 7 day-a-week access to information about their case through a new automated voice response system;
- Trigger an alarm as soon as a problem arises with child support payments to allow us to enforce compliance as quickly as possible;
- Speed adjustment of support orders to reflect improvements in a non-custodial parent's income through automatic, periodic review of those orders; and
- Give us much more detailed information about the children we serve so that we can do even better by them.

➤ We're out to make FY94 even better for the children of single parent families.

To DOR Staff...

An ordinary day at CSE requires extraordinary efforts from employees. Your hard work and dedication have made all that we have achieved this year possible. I especially want to thank the staff of the following units:

Project Development, who planned our successful enforcement campaigns such as the 10 Most Wanted, New Hires, 25% Wage Acceleration and Bank Levy Project;

Communications, whose work with the press got out our message — that we are very serious about child support — and who planned the media events which brought our program so much national attention;

Litigation Services, for their legal expertise in the development of the new enforcement programs;

Case Management, for researching the thousands of case reviews requested by customers;

Policy and Procedures Bureau, which drafted a comprehensive legislative package designed to give Massachusetts the most innovative and aggressive child support enforcement program in the country; and

Customer Service and Problem Resolution Office, for their management of the thousands of customer calls received each week.

These CSE achievements would not have been possible without the contributions of DOR employees working in other Divisions, especially:

Information Resources, which provided the computer system support to make our automated enforcement strategies a success; and

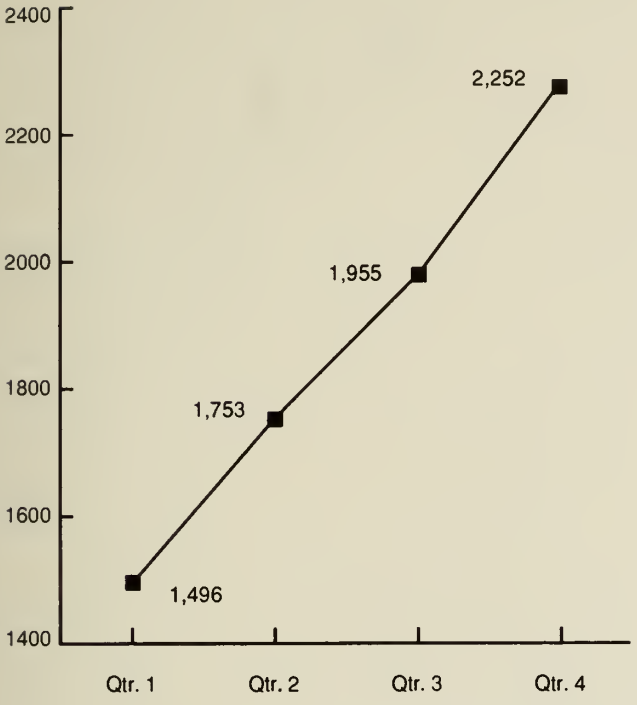
Processing, whose speedy data entry of wage reporting and new hire information greatly expedited child support to those Massachusetts families in need.

Thank you,

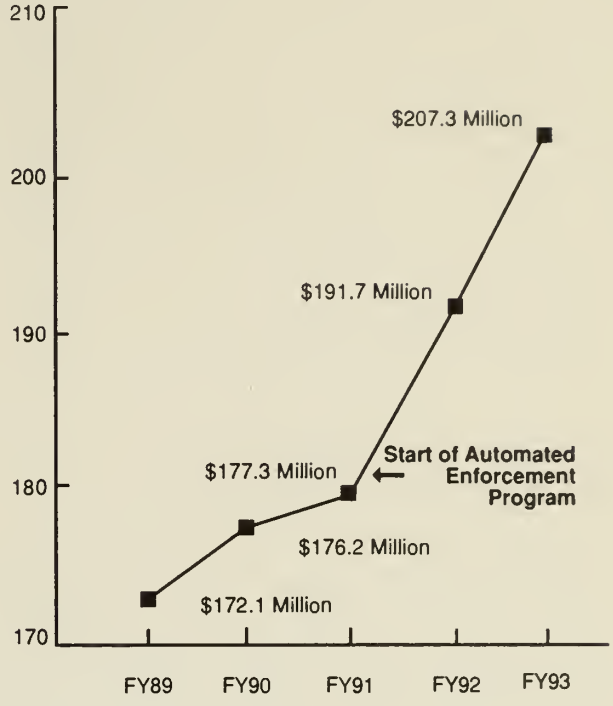
Mitchell Adams

FY93 Performance Overview

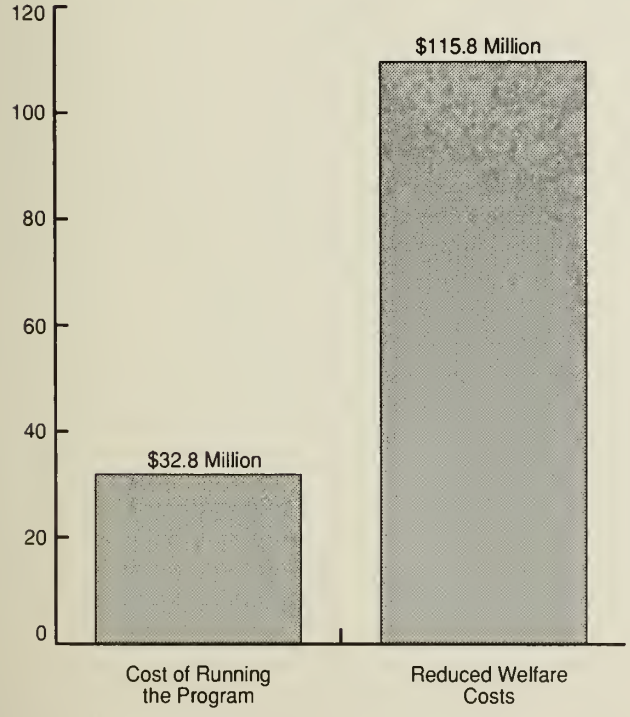
We're establishing more child support orders...



Collections are rising...



The taxpayers are saving money...



And best of all, **9,500 More Families Are Receiving Support**